OUR FAITH

Published by The Unitarian Christian Fellowship

Purpose:--"To diffuse the knowledge and promote the interests of pure religion, which, in accordance with the teachings of Jesus, is summed up in love to God and love to man."

VOL. 2 APRIL, 1948 No. 8

A Prayer

Light of the world, let this day fill up all its blue in our hearts, whatever it may bring to our skies. May we live it as those for whom all the yesterdays mark some better way than leads to dusty death. May we march with a song; may our feet be shod with a fine hard faith in living; and may we win at least some little token of the Eternal from the fleeting hours. We bless thee for the work we have to do, and for our measure of health with which to do it, and for the spirit's assurance that even by the weakest there is always something to be done. If doing without must be our portion, may we accept it with the valor of a decisive act. We bless thee for the hopes which struggle out of our most wretched failures; for the chagrin which disturbs our shallow successes; and for the secret laughter which is somewhere in our bitterest tears. We bless thee for the constant love of those with whom we dwell; for the friends who remain faithful even in their woundings; and for the surprising kindness we often meet from strangers. We bless thee for those who are wiser than we are, and make us a little less foolish when we read their living words; and for those who are braver than we are, and make us a little less fearful when we behold their immortal deeds. We bless thee for the dear Christ, and for the host of Christian chivalry, beyond number or name. O True Light of life, we lift this day to thee.—Amen.

A Resolution

(Which will be offered for vote at the May Meetings by the Unitarian Christian Fellowship).

RESOLVED: That our churches recognize and deplore the alarming growth of secularism among us, as well as in our age, and urge upon all our churches a deepening of the spiritual emphasis in all our work, that the spirit of Jesus, and the consciousness of God, may permeate our personal and social life.

"Lost Religious Liberals"

ROWLAND GRAY-SMITH
(Minister, New North Church, Hingham, Mass.)

Rev. Delos O'Brian's article about the Unitarians in the "Christian Century" of February 11 has caused much comment. Mr. O'Brian came into the American Unitarian Association sixteen years ago and during the last decade has been the recipient of large administrative bounty, having been made Director of the Association, President of the Ministers, and for a few months until his recent resignation, Minister-at-Large.

Mr. O'Brian now finds that the religious liberals "who have come to power" in our denomination are "lost." They inspire the title he gives his article, "Lost Religious Liberals." But whether that is true of them or not, his article is not likely to lead them to initiate a reform which will subject their power to democratic controls. Rather they may sustain themselves against the force of what looks like a Parthian shot with the reflection that another insurgent has closed their door behind him.

The main charge made by Mr. O'Brian against the Directors and Officers of the A.U.A. is one that cannot be dismissed lightly. "The lost religious liberals," he writes, "have no gospel. They claim otherwise, of course; they claim that 'freedom' is their gospel. Even a child knows, however, that unless freedom is defined and

used it means absolutely nothing."

Mr. O'Brian thus puts his finger on a real issue facing our denomination today. Up to a few years ago the A.U.A. had a purpose, given in its By-Laws. Theoretically, that purpose still stands. But the Directors and Officers, without seeking authorization by the Annual Meeting, have taken it upon themselves to discard the Association's constitutional purpose. In its place they have put the so-called "Free Mind Principle." They have been speaking and writing as if this principle was our authorized bond of union. They have distributed tens of thousands of pieces of printed matter presenting Freemindism as the basis of our fellowship. They have sought to make the word "Unitarian" connote simply "Freemindist."

All that has proved most divisive. It has driven a wedge between the Association's administration and many of the Association's ministers and churches. While the By-Laws of the A.U.A. have been saying one thing, the Directors and Officers of the A.U.A. have been saying something different. And we have it on the best authority that a house divided against itself cannot stand.

The Directors and Officers might have had the wisdom to do what nothing at present in the constitution compels them to do, namely, to put their proposed new bond of union to the democratic test. Had that been done, Mr. O'Brian could have raised his voice on a platform more appropriate than the one circumstances have led him to use. Did there exist amongst us some sort of system whereby official policies were freely discussed and openly voted upon, so tense and excoriating an article would never come to be written, and no one could ever argue that our officialdom is "lost." Surely there is hope that something may be done soon along these lines.

The Need of Faith

DELOS O'BRIAN

(Formerly Minister-at-Large for the Pacific Coast Area of the American Unitarian Association).

I am happy to contribute to "Our Faith" at the request of the editor because this modest four-page paper represents something far greater than its size might indicate. It represents a religious faith and this faith is stated in a way that leads people rather than misleads them.

The urgent need today is both for religious faith and for clear, positive statements of religious faith. The need is not only for religious people but for people who know why they are religious.

This is a problem that is particularly pressing among religious liberals. Nothing can be so misleading as liberalism, when liberals have formulated no faith and therefore have nothing to be liberal for.

One cannot possibly escape the realization that the religious liberal's first duty now is to know his own mind. Unlike the secularist, however, the religious person neither starts nor ends with the mind alone. The man of faith knows there is still another way, still another procedure—from soul to mind, from worship to work, from prayer to practice. The few religious liberals who follow this procedure do make up their minds, do have religious faith, do know how to state their faith clearly and positively.

The last shred of religion, or of pretense even, has departed when the charge can be made seriously that knowing one's own mind and stating one's religious faith with forthright conviction is capitulating to extremism. The alternative to that kind of extremism is anarchy.

Therefore I am happy to add my voice to those other voices which represent a faith, know what their faith consists of, and are unafraid to state their faith in obvious, unmistakable terms. The compulsion of the hour is for every available testimony to the power and presence of God, to the redeeming and empowering influence of worship and to the Church as the agent and the avenue for man's spiritual enterprise.

Let us continue to give this testimony with authority, and not as the scribes and Pharisees.

An Evaluation of Humanism

DANA M. GREELEY

(Minister, Arlington Street Church, Boston, Mass.)

In so far as humanism has focused its attention upon man and man's responsibility, and in so far as it has championed ethical values and the social conscience, humanism has rendered religion and mankind a great service. Undoubtedly, as in the

time of Erasmus and the Socinii brothers, so in our time, religious humanism has had an important role to play. It has had to challenge the moral and social indifference and the spiritual detachment of many Christians. It has had to make the church more worldly, in a sense, because it was too other-worldly.

And yet not all Christianity nor all belief in God have been in need of this challenge. Many Christians and many theists, and far more than most humanists would readily admit, have as much moral passion and humanitarian zeal as any humanist.

And, further, in its agnosticism or atheism, and in its denial of absolutes, and of the transcendent reality of the spirit, I believe humanism has hurt religion and welcomed darkness and despair. This I call its negative aspect. And this I regret.

For I must be a realist, in the sense that I would assert that we can know our world, and that knowing it we must discover it to sustain the values that we cherish. To the extent that humanism shuts out or neglects what has been known as metaphysics or theology or cosmic philosophy, I believe that humanism is wrong.

This negative humanism is not enough. For even to understand man, which is the avowed intention of humanism, we must understand him as we understand everything else in a context. We must understand his derivation and his destiny. We must somehow explain and vindicate his idealism and moral passion.

The most important question in the world is, Why is man here? and What is his purpose? I cannot accept the thesis that his development has been accidental, or that Jeremiah and Jesus and Shakespeare and Lincoln were the product of chance, or of a universe that does not support the values in which they themselves believed. I cannot reduce the human soul, whether of people of the past whom I revere, or of those in the present whom I love, to physical or physiological terms. I will agree, if you wish it, that man is one with nature, and that religion is natural, as Theodore Parker asserted that religion is natural. But that does not debase religion, it exalts nature. And it does not mean that because religion is natural, it is not also spiritual. Some would suggest that Parker was a humanist, for he was independent and had a strong ethical sense like that of Erasmus, and he professed, it is true, a natural rather than a supernatural faith. But he relied upon the intuition of the soul. He believed in the revelation that comes from within. He put his trust in God, and duty, and immortality. Parker believed in absolutes. And it seems to me that religion must have absolutes.

I think religion is faith in absolutes rather than acquiescence in a theory of moral relativity. The universe is knowable, even though our knowledge be but in part. And God is not irrelevant; he is the bread of life to the soul of man. Values are not fleeting, or solely humanistic. There are moral laws that hold the world together, and they are just as much a part of the universe and just as eternal as the gravitation that keeps the stars on their courses. Man is not the measure of all things, though he is by degrees the measurer of all things. And to understand him we must understand the power that created him.

This humanism is not enough for me. I believe in God, the Father of all mankind, the source and the renewer of our life and of all life. I believe in man as the child of God and that his spirit is stronger than death. I believe that ultimately truth must conquer error, and love must vanquish hate, and right must prevail over wrong. I believe in the light that shines from all heroic souls, and most brightly from the Man of Galilee.

For me, Unitarianism is not an ethical system like Confucianism. Unitarianism has, in addition to its ethics and inspiring its ethics, behind and beyond its humanitarianism, a deep, spiritual theistic faith which, if centered in man, is centered, as it was with Emerson, in man's soul. Emerson spoke first, last and always of the soul, but he also said, "Always our being is descending into us from we know not whence." And he said, "Ineffable is the union of man and God in every act of the soul."

My Faith

DOUGLAS PERCY BRAYTON

(Minister of Unitarian churches in Chelmsford and Tyngsborough, Mass.)

I prefer to speak of my "faith" rather than my "creed," because "creed" refers

more to intellectual belief, whereas "faith" is belief in action.

First, my faith is in God. I have a deep faith in God as the result of my personal experience and of my intimate pastoral relations with other people. As the years have passed these experiences have made this faith more firm, more deep, more permanent. All the arguments of the humanists and the atheists cannot shake that faith. I know that God exists and I know that He reaches into the minds and hearts and souls of individuals.

Second, my faith owes much to the Bible. The Bible contains man's supreme literature. It deals with varieties of religious experiences which never change. Though not dictated by God, it expresses the thoughts and experiences of men and women who were inspired by God. In view of its fundamental value for our religious faith, the Bible should be the basis of the religious education program in every denomination.

Third, I believe in Jesus. I am not concerned with theological controversy over the way in which the human and divine were united in him. The important thing is that for a short time he was on earth, and that he gave to the world a system of teachings which have persisted through the ages. He portrayed most vividly the human abilities which, with the influence of the divine, make it possible for man to live in accordance with high and noble principles.

Fourth, I believe in Christianity. It has two elements, the teachings of Jesus, and the Church which has preserved and transmitted them. Christianity today includes many varieties of churches and there are many interpretations of the teachings of Jesus. Yet historically they are all traceable to a common source. While my own interpretation and denominational affiliation may differ from those of others, I am part of the great religious movement which is called Christianity.

Such is my faith. It is neither new nor startling. It has grown out of my Unitarian heritage. It finds its support in the teachings of the great Unitarian divines. It is Unitarianism.

I fear God, and next to God I chiefly fear him who fears Him not.—Saadi.

Make Your Reservation!

In Anniversary Week, the Unitarian Christian Fellowship will meet for supper on Tuesday, May 25, at the (new) Old South Church, Copley Square.

Dr. George H. Williams of the Harvard Divinity School will give the address: "The Church: Unitarians and the Historic Community of Faith."

Make your reservation now with Rev. Paul H. Chapman, 33 Glen Green, Winchester, Mass. Tickets for the supper are $1.00.

Parker on Christianity

THEODORE PARKER

"To turn away from the disputes of the Catholics and the Protestants, of the Unitarian and the Trinitarian, of old school and new school, and come to the plain words of Jesus of Nazareth—Christianity is a simple thing, very simple. It is absolute, pure morality; absolute pure religion—the love of man; the love of God acting without let or hindrance. The only creed it lays down is the great truth which springs up spontaneous in the holy heart—**there is a God.**"

"OUR FAITH" is published monthly (except July and August) by The Unitarian Christian Fellowship, 27 Marlborough St., Boston 16, Mass. Mr. Theodore Browne, Chairman; Rev. Paul H. Chapman, 33 Glen Green, Winchester, Mass., Secretary.

Editor: Rev. Harvey Swanson, 538 W. Chestnut St., Lancaster, Pa.

Subscription price: $1.00 per year, payable to the Treasurer, Mr. Joseph E. Coulter, 101 Tremont St., Boston 8, Mass.

Contributions toward the expenses of "Our Faith" are gladly welcomed from all friends.

Extra copies of "Our Faith" in quantity may be secured, for distribution in local parishes, and for literature tables, from the editor, or from King's Chapel House, 27 Marlborough St., Boston 16, Mass.

Articles suitable for publication in "Our Faith" are welcome from all who wish to use these columns to express Unitarian Christianity.

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